

Description of a Trip to St. Nicholas Island in the Year 1897

By

John L. Kelly of San Diego, California

The island of St. Nicholas lies about one hundred and fifty miles northwest of San Diego. Probably but few people living on the main-land know of this rather remarkable island, and still fewer know of its remarkable past history.

It is a body of land with an average width of three miles and an average length of seven miles; hence it would contain about twenty-one sections or about 13,340 acres. It is a large tableland or plateau with an average altitude of six hundred feet above sea level. The highest point on it, according to the United States Coast Survey, is 890 feet.

I visited this strange spot in the fall of 1897, and spent nearly a week wandering over it. From the viewpoint of one who takes an interest in the past of the Indians of Southern California, it is the most interesting place I have ever visited. It undoubtedly was at one time the abiding place of a large number of Indians, as indicated by their old camps which are everywhere in evidence.

By far the most remarkable thing to me was the human skeletons lying scattered over the island. I have lived for over forty years on a Southern California cattle ranch, and have been in the habit of seeing the skeletons of cattle, horses and sheep scattered over the range, but in all these years of riding over San Diego County, I have never seen a place where skeletons of animals were more plentiful than human skeletons were at the time of my visit to St. Nicholas Island. How these skeletons came to be here, I will talk about later in this article.

I'm sorry to say that at the time of my visit I did not take the interest in Indian history that I have since developed, or I might have made this article more interesting. I don't know any better way to describe what I saw at this strange, and I might say weird spot, than by describing my trip from beginning to end. However, before going any farther, I want to state that those of you who know me are aware that I am not a writer and the rest of my readers will know it before they finish reading this article.

But to get down to my story... I will begin by saying that I had, some years previous, made a visit to Catalina and San Clemente Islands, and spent some ten days in sailing around, and in traveling and climbing over them, in company with my old chum, J.W. Squires. I was not surprised, therefore, when I received a letter from him asking me to join him in a trip to St. Nicholas. My friend said he had made all arrangements with a fisherman of San Pedro to take us out with our camp outfit. This fisherman was going out to investigate the crawfishing around the island as that would be practically new fishing ground, being at that time too far offshore for the rest of the fishermen. Squires had made all arrangements about camp outfit except bedding which I took with me.

We got off the train at San Pedro and walked down on the wharf where our fisherman friend was waiting for us. My friend introduced him as Swan Lee (which sounds as if he might wear paper-soled slippers and a pig-tail); but he was far from being in that class, being a hearty Norwegian sailor who had fished along the coast of Norway in his younger days.

I must confess that when I saw his boat, I had some misgivings, for it did not look as if it were ever intended to go to sea in. It was twenty-four feet long, and eight feet beam, and the deck was not more than a foot above the water line. It was what the fisherman called a "salmon boat," sharp at both ends, and decked over with a small cockpit, and a little cabin about five feet wide and five feet eight inches long. I am not sure of the exact length but I am sure that it was NOT five feet ten inches, for that is my height and having slept in that cabin one night, I can testify that it lacked at least two inches of being long enough for me to lie straight in.

However, we got our camp outfit aboard and put to sea at about ten o'clock in the forenoon. There were four of us on board: Swan Lee and a French boy about eighteen years old named Paul, Will Squires and myself. After we got well out to sea, I asked our old Skipper if he thought he could ride a storm in this boat? His answer was: "Certainly, I tank so! If I don't tank I can vedder any storm dat come, I don't go out to sea."

He then told me that he had fished for many years off the coast of Norway where, according to him, they had very heavy weather. He said the fishermen at San Pedro were always talking about the storms that they had been out in while fishing off that place, but Swan Lee said that "if they would get a storm like they used to get off the coast of Norway they would think they had never seen a real storm before." He was a quiet, sensible man and after getting acquainted with him I learned to have perfect confidence in his ability.

He ran into Catalina Island that evening at about four o'clock at a place called "Johnston's Landing" which is on the east side of the island opposite to what is called the Isthmus. It is well up towards the north end of the island. We anchored here for the night. Paul pulled Will and me ashore. Swan wouldn't go ashore, as he had been warned by the Bannings, who own the island, not to land. We wandered about for a while but saw no one, as this part of the island at the time was not inhabited by anyone. However, I saw the largest fig tree growing within a quarter mile of the shore, that I have ever seen anywhere. The tree had been planted many years before by parties who had lived there, but it had grown a long time without any cultivation whatever. It had a good crop of fruit on it but the crows were harvesting the crop as fast as they ripened.

We returned to the boat about sunset, and had our supper aboard. As the Bannings allow no one on the island unless they come over on their steamers, we did not feel like taking chances on being arrested, so we all decided to sleep on the boat that night. Paul made him up a bunk in the hold, and Swan, Will, and I slept---or tried to sleep---in the little cabin. In the morning I got up to rest.

As the prevailing wind along this coast is from the N.W., we were completely cut off from the island from any wind at the place where we were lying; so, in order

that we might get out and be ready to take advantage of the first sea breeze that should spring up, we determined to pull around the north end of the island, or, in other words, to get out from under the lea of the island. So we didn't stop for breakfast, but got out the sweeps and began to pull around towards the northwest.

My friend Squires had been seasick most all the night so did not feel much like work, but the Skipper, Paul and I were hard at it. We got her around to the north end finally, where the swell was very heavy, though there was not a breath of wind stirring at that time of the morning. I had been on the water quite a bit and had never been the least seasick, but that morning while pulling around the headland in a heavy ground swell, I began to feel "sort of queer." The continued rising and falling of those big swells, in that little boat, with no wind in the sails to steady her, was something fierce. Will, who had been feeding the fish all the way around, kept saying "Aren't you feeling sick yet, John?" I would answer "No" and go on rowing. Finally we went over three big, greasy swells, one right after the other and immediately I knew for the first time how it felt to be seasick. Luckily for me, however, the breeze sprang up just then, the boat began to gather way, and immediately my seasickness was gone.

We intended to make Santa Barbara Island that night, if possible, which was a beat of thirty miles dead to windward. We had light winds all day and made the island just at dark. Just as we were beating up under the lea of it, the boom swung around and knocked my hat off. The Skipper put the boat about and we turned around several times looking for it, but as it was getting quite dark and the ocean was thick with floating kelp, it was a hard matter to find such a thing as a hat. After grabbing at everything that looked black, time after time, I made up my mind that I would have to put in the rest of the trip bareheaded. But just as we had given up the search, I made a grab at something dark in the water at the side of the boat and brought up my hat. That old, water soaked lid surely looked good to me just then.

As my friend Squires had been sick all day, he didn't like the idea of sleeping aboard the boat again and asked me if I would go ashore and spend the night on the island with him. I agreed, so, after we had eaten a little supper, the Skipper took us ashore. We had to land on a shelf of rock, as there was no sand beach there, and the

sea was pretty rough. However, the Skipper brought the stern of the skiff up as near as he could without letting her strike the shelf of rock, and by watching my chance, I threw the bedding onto the rocks out of reach of the waves, and, when the next wave subsided, managed to jump ashore myself. Squires was pretty dizzy, but managed to get ashore safely too. We climbed up onto a bench of land a hundred feet or more above the beach and spread out our bedding on the ground and turned in for the night. Will said it seemed good to be on "terra firma" again, but the island rolled all night with me just as if I had been on the boat. (I have noticed that people who are not seasick on the water usually have the feeling of the land rolling with them when they come on shore, while those who have been sick on the water generally say the land is perfectly steady when they finally get on it).

The next morning we were up early and, having prepared a light breakfast from the few eatables we had brought with us from the boat, we started out to explore the island.

Santa Barbara is located about thirty miles N.W. of Catalina Island. It is simply the tip of a mountain sticking out of the sea. It contains not more than six hundred and forty acres, or a section of land. The height of the island at the highest point is 547 feet above sea level. I was told there was no fresh water on it, but someone had a few sheep there some years previous to our visit for we saw the bones of several dead sheep.

One of the most remarkable things I saw there was a bird village. It is on the N.W. side of the island, on a small bench of rather flat land. Here the sea birds nest and raise their young. At the time of our visit there were no eggs or young birds, as they hatch in the spring, but there were nests by the thousands. There seemed to be a nest on every square yard of ground over a space of several acres! While we were wading through this bird village, the sky was swarming with old gulls, and such a squeaking and screaming I have never heard, before or since. After exploring the island for an hour or so we walked back to the landing place and Paul came after us in the skiff, so we were soon aboard once more.

We got under way and stood down around the south end of the island. We were told that there was a large band of seals that frequented the cliffs at the south

end. So we thought we would try to get some photographs of them. We stood close in to the land, and came suddenly around the point where there were several hundred seals, old and young, basking on the rocks. The old ones immediately scrambled off the into the sea but the young ones remained huddled up on the rocks, barking and yelping as if their hearts would break. Paul took Squires ashore in a skiff to try to get a picture of the baby seals, while Swan and I stood aboard the sloop. The big seals were all around the boat, barking hoarsely, and apparently trying to draw our attention away from their young. Will did not succeed in getting any good pictures of the little fellows, so he and Paul came aboard and we stood away for St. Nicholas, which lies a little south of west from Santa Barbara Island, and distant about thirty miles.

The wind was very light that morning and we made slow progress. The old Skipper gave me the course and left me to steer the boat. Will, as usual, was not feeling very well, so was lying down in the little cabin. After a time, Paul went down too to take a nap. Towards noon, the Skipper went below and I was left above with the tiller. I was, of course, sitting at the stern of the boat, and as I have already said, the deck was not more than a foot above the water, so I could have put my hand back in it at any time had I so desired. Happening to glance back into the sea just behind the boat, I was somewhat startled to see two large sharks following right behind us and not more than a couple of feet under the water. I called out to the other boys that there were two sharks right under our stern. The Skipper came out of the cabin immediately, but Will and Paul were asleep. As soon as the Skipper saw how close the sharks were, he said to me "We will get one of them!"

We had several large albacore lying on the deck that we had caught earlier in the day. The Skipper cut off a piece of one of these and hooked it on to a heavy trolling line which I was holding. I then threw the line out close to where the shark was swimming; he saw it at once; he came for it; he turned on his side to take it in. The old Skipper shouted "Don't let him take it or he will snap the line off like a pair of shears!" I then gave him the line and picked up an old 22 calibre rifle that Will had brought with us.

The old Skipper said "Now be ready to shoot him John!" He let the shark get hold of just the end of the bait and then pulled him along until he had his head out of the water, not more than three feet from the side of the boat. As soon as his head came out of the water I shot him, but I did not think I was going to kill him with that little ball, for he was at least eight feet long. But at the crack of that little rifle, he rolled over on his back, stone dead.

The shot waked the boys and they came tumbling out. Will shouted "Where is the gaff hook? We will pull him on deck." He was rushing about looking for the gaff hook but couldn't find it. The Skipper knew where the hook was but wouldn't tell Will, as he said afterwards he didn't want the shark on deck. By the time Will had found the gaff, the shark had slowly sunk out of reach.

Just at this time the breeze had died down and we were making no headway at all. The other shark now came alongside, and didn't seem the least alarmed by having his brother killed, so Will and Paul said "We will get him!" They put another piece of fish on the hook and threw it out to him. The Skipper held the line and the shark immediately took the bait. Paul held the rifle, as he wanted to have the honor of shooting him. As soon as his head was out of the water, Paul shot a distance of not more than four feet---and missed him clean! The shark let go of the bait and nothing would induce him to take it again.

However, he did not seem to be frightened in the least, for he came up on the other side while not more than a foot below the surface. Will got the gaff hook then and reached down under the shark and said "I can pull him on the deck alive!"

The old Skipper was shouting "Don't you pull him on deck!"

Finally Will hooked him with the gaff and lifted him almost entirely out of the water; but with a great splash the shark threw himself free from the hook and dived so deep that we saw him no more.

These sharks are ugly looking fellow of a yellowish color, with large white spots over their bodies. They have a mouth full of wicked looking teeth and are large enough to attack a person, but I do not know whether they would do so or not, if they had the opportunity.

Soon after this exciting shark killing, the breeze sprang up and we began to make good time. About the middle of the afternoon, we saw a boat ahead that was probably bound for the mainland. She proved to be a small schooner called the "Sea King" and she had been taking a party of relic hunters out to St. Nicholas Island. She had left them there for a couple of weeks when she would go out again and bring them home.

After this time too, the islands loomed faintly in the distance ahead and at about five in the afternoon we came to the heavy kelp beds that surround it. We had some difficulty in making our way through this kelp, but finally came to anchor about two hundred yards from shore where there was another small fishing boat. This boat contained two men and after we had had our supper, one of them offered to pilot us into the little bay called "Coral Harbor."

We got our camp things into the skiff and this man and the Skipper pulled us ashore. He took us to where it looked as if we were going right into a cliff of rocks, but when we got close in, an opening appeared in the rocks and we went through it into a little bay.

The entrance is no more than twenty-five feet wide and the little bay not more than a hundred and fifty feet in diameter, and the loose sand had blown in and filled nearly half of it up.

We landed with our camp stuff and went up on the hillside, a short distance from the bay, where there was an old stone house with a shingle roof. It had been built many years before and the drifting sands had almost buried it. The walls, which were about five feet high, were entirely covered by the sands and they had piled up against the roof on the south side to some extent.

There had been a bunch of Chinese living in it, sometime previous to our visit, and it smelled something fierce.

The wind was blowing hard and the sand was blowing outside, but we decided to camp outside rather than to endure the smell in that old house. We spread our beds out on the sand. Before arranging our beds for the night we strolled down to the camp of the relic hunters, which was a couple of hundred yards further west along the shore. They had pitched their tent and got their camp in pretty good shape.

When we came up to their camp they came out, but did not seem to be very sociable at first, and made short answers to all our questions.

However, after we told them who we were, and what our business was, they talked much more freely.

The next morning they came up to our camp and were very agreeable. They told us that they had thought, at first, that we were men who kept sheep on the island, and whom, they had been told, might order them off. They were wondering what they would do if ordered off, as they had no boat to take them away.

We informed them that this island was owned by the United States government and was held as a military reservation' and that they had as much right there as anybody, and that if the sheep men should come along, to tell them where to go!

They said they were very glad to get this information as they had supposed the sheep men had some claim on this place.

We slept out on the sand that first night in a howling wind and the next morning our bedclothes were almost buried in sand. We were up at daylight the next morning, and after a short stroll, came back to camp. We built a small fire of driftwood in the lea of a small bluff and cooked our breakfast.

After eating, and putting our camp things away as snugly as possible, we went for a hike over the island.

The signs of old Indian camps were everywhere. Along the shoulder of the island, a short distance above the old stone house, it looked as if Indians had camped there for ages.

After strolling around over these old camps for a while, we went onto the top of the mesa. Here there were more signs of old Indian camps, and here we saw skeletons of human beings lying everywhere. There seemed to be no way of telling whether they had ever been buried or not. The loose sand from the beach has been steadily blowing over the north end of the island, and there are now several hundred, or even several thousand acres, covered with drifting white sand.

These skeletons may have been buried in the sand many years ago, and the sand since blown off them by the strong N.W. winds that blow so much out here.

One cannot walk around and see human bones lying about here, there, and everywhere without some sad thoughts flitting through his mind. Had it been a battleground? Or had pestilence at some remote time swept over the island and caused these bodies to be left unburied?

Some have thought that a shipwrecked party may have been cast ashore here and perished for want of food. As there are skeletons on San Clemente Island too, it looks more as if it had been coast Indians who formerly, according to early history, inhabited all these islands. Bancroft in his history of the Pacific Coast gives an account that may explain to some extent how these bones come to be here in such numbers.

He tells us that in the early days, there were a great many sea otter around the shores of the coast islands, and that the Russian sealers frequently called here to buy otter skins from the natives. As these natives were not fond of hunting, the Russians could not get so many skins as they would have liked. He says "It was not an uncommon thing for the sealers to shoot the Indians for the otter skin clothing they wore."

After quarreling with these Indians for several seasons because they did not hunt the otter, the sealers finally brought down forty Indians from Kodiak Island, off the coast of Alaska, and put them ashore on St. Nicholas Island to hunt the otter, an art in which they were expert.

Soon afterwards these Northern Indians went to war with the native Indians of the Island and killed all the men of the tribe, but spared the women. This may explain how so many skeletons came to be lying about.

Bancroft also tells us that these Indians were a very wild and uncivilized lot, and that the priests who were trying to Christianize and civilize the Indians at the Missions along the mainland, were continually annoyed by these wild tribes from the islands coming over to the mainland in their canoes, and exciting the Mission Indians to do acts of violence.

After putting up with this annoyance for some years, the Priests decided that the only solution to the problem was to bring the Island Indians over to the Missions and keep them under control.

So, in 1837, they sent a schooner over to St. Nicholas Island, seized all the natives and brought them aboard the vessel, with the idea of bringing them to the mainland. This they did, with the exception of one squaw, who, after she had been taken aboard the schooner, claimed her baby had been left ashore, so just as the vessel was getting under way to leave the island, she jumped overboard and swam ashore. Whether they attempted to get her at the time or not is not very clear, but at any rate, no more was heard of her until 1855, or eighteen years afterwards this squaw was found upon the island where she had lived alone for eighteen years. She was taken over to Santa Barbara where everything was done that her captors could think of to try to get her story of her long, lonesome stay on that desolate island, but she had forgotten her own native tongue and could only communicate by means of signs.

Indians were brought who tried to converse with her in the old dialect of the island Indians, but she could understand none of them.

She had made them understand by means of signs, however, that she had not found her baby alive when she reached the island, but that it had been eaten by wild dogs, of which there were many on the island. She also gave them to understand that she had frequently seen vessels near the island, and had even seen parties land there, but that she always concealed herself until the coast was clear again.

At the time of her capture, she had a robe she made from bird skins; and it is said by those who have seen it, that it is a most beautiful piece of work. This robe was kept for some years in a museum in Santa Barbara, but was later sent to Rome. This squaw had lived all those years upon shellfish and birds that she snared, together with seeds of grass that grew upon the island. This sounds very much like a fairy tale, but I think there is no doubt of the truth of it.

We landed upon the island upon Friday and after strolling around all Saturday forenoon and sizing up the situation at the North end of the island, we went back to our camp and put in the rest of the day cleaning up the old stone house and moving our camp inside. We had brought two hammocks with us, and we stretched them across from rafter to rafter, and fixed very comfortable beds where we were out of the disagreeable wind and the drifting sand.

Some parties who had been here before us had carried down some human bones and setup part of a skeleton on each side of the door; and there were human bones struck around the eaves and in holes in the stone walls inside, which would have given anyone who was a bit inclined to be superstitious, the cold chills. However, as none of us were of the superstitious class, we did not let these things trouble us.

That evening the Skipper and Paul came ashore to visit us, and we all went down to the tent of the relic hunters and spent the evening. This party, as I believe I have already stated, consisted of three men. The leader of the party was a man from Los Angeles, whose name was Bowers. He told us he had made a business of gathering Indian relics for several years and had gotten together quite a collection. Another man in their party was named "Lee," and I have forgotten the third man's name.

The Skipper said he intended to sail around the island the next day just to size up the coastline and asked us all to accompany him on the trip, which we all readily agreed to do. The next morning Paul came ashore in the skiff and took the five of us out to the sloop, and as soon as we were all on board we got under way. We stood out around the North end of the island and down along the West shore; keeping as close in shore as it was safe to go, so that we could get a good idea of the coast. We had a strong N.W. wind and made good time running before it down along the west side of the island. At the south end, we saw the old landing that had been used in days gone by, by the sheep men and there were also a lot of seals and sea-lions on the rocks at that point. We rounded the south end and came up along the east side of the island beating dead to windward.

The kelp beds along this side of the island are not more than three or four hundred yards from shore and the Skipper decided to beat up in the clear water inside the kelp. The water seemed to be deep close to the rocky shore and he would beat it till it looked as if he would surely put her on the rocks; then suddenly putting his helm "hard a lea" we would go about and be off on the other tack.

As we got further up along the east side, the wind increased until we werew all drenched with the spray that was flying across our decks like driving rain.

Our old Skipper put on his oil skins and stood at the helm with turn of the main sheet around a cleat and holding her close to the wind as she would lay. The little boat would heel over until she was almost flat on her side. It was surely an exciting trip, beating up that narrow strip of water between the kelp beds and the island, but we were making fine time and were back at our anchorage early in the afternoon.

The next day we took a trip over the island walking clear down to the south end. On our way down we kept along the eastern edge of the table land, and coming back along the western edge. There were a few sheep still on the island. Some years previous there had been a large herd there, but the owners had for some reason taken them away, all but a few, which it seems had escaped them in some way, and these had multiplied until now there were probably in the neighborhood of a hundred or more. And here I saw a sight that surprised me. I had always supposed that sheep that were not shorn, would shed their wool during the season, and I think that most of them do, but here I saw several sheep with their wool actually dragging the ground. These few sheep had received no attention for several years and a very large percentage had evidently shed their wool, but we saw a dozen or more with wool dragging the ground, as I have said.

Another peculiar thing about this island is the number of springs upon it. Almost every ravine had a little water, and one, at the north end of the island had quite a stream of water flowing from the top of the mesa down to the sea. We thought there were at least five miner's inches of water flowing in that one ravine. All the water that we found in these various springs was a little brackish, but not so bad that we could not drink it.

Near the beach at the N.W. end of the island we found where a grave had recently opened and it looked as if someone had been temporarily buried there and then the corpse taken up for reburial at some other more civilized place. A rough wooden box that had been used for a temporary coffin was left lying on the bank of the open grave and from the papers covered with Chinese characters, we judged that a Chinaman had probably been the temporary occupant of the grave and had afterwards been taken up and shipped back to the "Flowery Kingdom" where very Chinaman wishes his bones to finally rest.

On coming up over the hill towards our camp, we found Bowers and his party digging up an old Indian graveyard in search of relics. They were digging where the ground was all buried up with white drifting sand and the skeletons they were finding weren't more than a foot under the surface. They had already uncovered several and we stayed until they had uncovered seven in all. We could not be certain that they had been originally buried. It looked to me as if the bodies might have been left on the surface of the ground and the sand had drifted over them, but as to that, no one could tell. If they had been buried, it had been done with no regard to order, for some lay with their heads to the west, some with their heads to the east, or in any other direction with absolutely no regard to any order. These seven corpses were dug up from a space of ground not over twenty feet square. One skeleton they moved while we were watching had five holes in the front of the skull about the size of a 32 calibre bullet and the back part of the skull had a large hole several inches across. We thought perhaps one of those Russian sealers that Bancroft tells about had talked nice to that Indian until he had gotten close enough to give him a load of buckshot in the forehead and in coming out the shot had torn the back of his skull away.

Bowers said that this must be a pauper's graveyard as they found very few relics of any kind in the graves. There were a lot of shell beads in each grave, which were probably strung round the Indian's neck at the time of death, but they found no implements of war such as they had hoped to find.

Mr. Bowers told us afterwards when we met him in Los Angeles that in the four weeks they spent upon St. Nicholas they made a collection of relics, which they sold for \$1200.00.

I have always been sorry that I did not devote more time while there, hunting for Indian relics; as it was, I picked up several things that I prize very highly. On one of our walks over the island, I picked up a little image of a whale made of hard blue stone and about four inches long. On another trip, I found two round stones with holes in the center, they are about the size and shape of doughnuts and are made of very hard pebbles. On one of our trips, when our Skipper was with us, he found one of the prettiest stone mortars that I have ever seen. It had been carved out in true

bowl shape and the outside had spiral fluting carved into it which made it very pretty. We saw many other common stone mortars and “metats” which I have since wished we brought home.

While Will and I were on the east side of the island one afternoon, we saw what I have always thought was one of the grandest sights I have ever seen. It was a large square rigged ship running down the coast probably bound for San Diego; the N.W. wind was blowing so hard that we had to keep a close hold on our hats. Where we stood on the high mesa over-looking the sea, the pretty stranger came roaring by close to the island, with every stitch of canvas set that her yards would spread. I would give a good deal for a picture of that ship as she looked that afternoon, heeled over so that we, viewing her from the weather side, could almost see her keel. And she was surely making good time for from the time she passed abreast of us until she was hull down, away down to the south east, seemed almost no time.

Finally, our Skipper and Paul came ashore one day and told us that open season for crawfish would open the next day and he was going home loaded, as he had found crawfish unusually good around the rocky shore near where he was anchored. He said he had not taken any yet but was expecting to load the boat that evening. He invited us to come out with them after supper and see them haul them in. We gladly accepted the invitation.

The crawfish are taken in with what they call “hoop nets,” which is a round ring of iron about three feet in diameter with a net like a bag of which the iron ring forms the mouth. From the ring, four ropes which are attached to the four opposite sides, come up to a point about three feet above the ring where they are fastened to one long rope, which is long enough to come up to the surface of the sea while the hoop net rests on the bottom. A large piece of fish of some sort is tied to the center of the this hoop net by means of strings and it is then let down to the bottom where it lies while a block of wood fastened to the end of the long rope floats on the surface of the sea. Our Skipper had probably a dozen of these hoops set along the rock shore where the water was from six to twenty feet deep.

We pulled from one of these to the other in a skiff and as soon as we were along the side of the float we would seize the rope and pull up the net.

The crawfish would gather around the bait, which as I have said, was in the middle of the net and when we pulled up on the hoop they would all fall into the net which was like a bag and we would haul them up and dump them into the boat.

Sometimes we would get as many as six or eight in one net and sometimes only two or three. As soon as we had dumped a net into the boat, we would immediately re-bait it and drop it down to the bottom again, and so keep going around from one net to the other. Once the Skipper pulled up a net and as he dumped it, shouted "Oh, that is a big eel!"

I had no idea what a sea eel was like, but the other boys (who were barefooted) immediately held their feet up on the seats of the boat and seemed greatly excited. The old Skipper seized a big knife that he kept in the boat and as the eel raced around from one end of the boat to the other, the old man would stab him every time he got near. He finally got him cornered in the stern of the boat and amid a great snapping of teeth on the part of Mr. Eel, finished him with a butcher knife.

After he was dead, I examined him and *then* knew why the boys held their feet up so high while he was racing around the boat. He had a mouth full of teeth like a big wild cat and could have easily bitten off a toe or several of them, if he had so desired---and he seemed to have a desire to bite everything that comes in their way; for when the skipper examined his fish lines that were coiled in the bottom of the boat, he found that the eel had cut them all in bits just as if it had been done with a pair of heavy shears.

As soon as we would get a skiff load of the crawfish, we would pull out to the sloop and put them in "gunny sacks" and hang them over the side in the water. We began early in the evening and by ten o'clock, the Skipper thought he had more crawfish than his boat would carry home. So we went back to our camp and got everything ready to sail for home at six the next morning.

We got everything boxed and the next morning were up at daybreak and had our breakfast.

Paul came for us in the boat so we were soon aboard and immediately set sail for home; and we bade good-bye to this weird, bleak, and wind-swept island.

The Skipper was in hopes that we would have a spanking breeze to run home in, but we were disappointed, for we had a very light wind, and none at all, part of the time, so we made very slow headway.

Our old Skipper set every rag she could spread—main sail, inner and outer job, and a big spinnaker, but still, in the light breeze we barely moved part of the time.

Just at dusk we were off the north end of Catalina Island where we left Paul in the skiff, as he was going to stay at Catalina Harbor and set traps and nets for crawfish until the Skipper could dispose of his load that he now had aboard and come back.

If the wind had been strong enough for us to have made good time on our run from St. Nicholas, we had intended running down to Catalina Harbor, which is some four miles from the northern end of the island and on the western side and leaving Paul there, but we had made such slow time in the light wind, that we decided not to go out of our course, but let Paul pull the four miles in the skiff.

There was quite a choppy sea running when we parted company with him, and it seemed rather like abandoning him, but I have no doubt he soon reached his landing place, though I have never seen him since.

We kept our course and made San Pedro Harbor at a little after midnight where we landed and spent the rest of the night at Swan Lee's cabin. And so, ended this little trip.

Upon looking back over a space of twenty-six years, I can say that it is one of the pleasantest memories of my life. And ever since, I have had a desire to go back to St. Nicholas Island.

I should like to explore it much more thoroughly than I did while there in 1897. To travel around the shore where there certainly are many very interesting points, and I should like to explore the many canyons and mesas where there are doubtless ollas, mortars and other interesting Indian relics hidden away.

As I remember the Island, it's geological formation was entirely of sandstone and shale and I think it entirely probable that oil will be found there in the future.

The southern two-thirds of St. Nicholas Island is fairly good pasture land. The rest of it is almost entirely buried by drifting sand. The back-bone, or main ridge of the island is rather near the western edge of the mesa and the land slopes gently from

this back-bone or ridge, towards the eat until you get within a half mile or so of the shore when it breaks quite sharply down to the sea. This mesa, however, is cut nearly across to the main ridge or back-bone by several deep canyons.

On the western side, it breaks very abruptly down to the rocky ocean's shore. In fact, as I remember it, there were apparently but few places along the western side where one could have gotten down from the mesa to the beach.

Off shore, at a distance of from a few hundred yards to half a mile, the island is surrounded on the North, East, and South, by great beds of kelp. I should judge the apparently shallow water near those kelp beds would be remarkably good fishing grounds. It would be an easy trip for the fishermen of today, with their power boats, to run over to St. Nicholas, but at the same time, we were there, they most all depended as we did, on sailing there and back and that was of course quite a long and tedious trip.

For anyone camping on the island, as we did, the only fuel available was dript-wood, and that was not very plentiful. There was at that time absolutely no trees, or even brush wood growing there. I did not see a single shrub with a trunk as thick as my wrist growing in any place upon the island.

In early days, there must have been brush wood of some sort growing there, for the old camp fires of the Indians, or rather ash heaps where such fires had been, were very much in evidence along the north end of the island.

They surely had some other source than the small amount of drift wood to depend upon. I could see no reason why the ordinary brush wood such as grows along the coast of the mainland and on Catalina and San Clement Islands, would not grow on St. Nicholas, for the land there is better than that on either of the larger islands near the shore.

It looked to me as though the island had formerly been partly covered by brush wood and that the larger number of Indians who undoubtedly used to inhabit the spot, had cleared the island of root and branch to replenish their fires.

Too bad that poor Indian woman who had livered there so many years by herself, could not have left some record of her experience. God only knows what she must have endured for those long, lonesome years on that bleak, wind-swept island.

Someday, I am going over there again!